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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the International Federation of University Women, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Please recycle

Promoting equal access to quality secondary, tertiary and continuing education for indigenous girls and women

The International Federation of University Women (IFUW)

The International Federation of University Women (IFUW) founded in 1919, is the leading girls' and women's global non-governmental organisation advocating for women's rights, equality and empowerment through access to lifelong, quality education and training up to the highest levels. IFUW promotes education across four key areas: secondary education; tertiary education; continuing education; and non-traditional education.

The Background

The Human Rights Council has repeatedly promoted the right to education, beginning with the 2008 Resolution 8/4 and several follow-up resolutions on education including Resolutions 11/6 15/4 and 17/3, including the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). IFUW would particularly like to draw attention to SDG 4.5: "By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations". Indigenous peoples' specific educational rights, including their right to establish and control their own education systems and to provide education in their own languages, have been supported by, for example , ILO Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (1989), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007), and confirmed, among others, by the Lima Declaration of the World Conference of Indigenous Women (2013) and the Outcome Document from the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (2013) . IFUW seeks to support indigenous peoples to deliver such programmes as far as possible, with a special emphasis on removing the obstacles to girls and women attending secondary and tertiary education.

The issues confronting indigenous girls and women in education

While education is widely recognised as a universal human right, indigenous girls and women continue to face difficulties in regard to education on a number of levels, both as women and as indigenous people. Indigenous women throughout the world are among the most marginalised groups of society, facing multiple counts of discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnicity, language and culture. The education gap between indigenous peoples and mainstream populations remains critical: rates of enrolment, retention, completion of and performance at primary school level are significantly lower and gender disparities are often further pronounced, preventing full access to secondary school. Indigenous educational deficits range from generalised exclusion to limited access to the upper levels of primary and secondary education, with admittance to higher education still being the exception. In terms of accessing secondary and tertiary education, minority girls and women face the greatest challenges. Despite widespread global recognition of the right to education, the international community as a whole is not on track to ensure the undisputed inclusion of indigenous girls and women. IFUW agrees strongly with the Expert Mechanism Advice Rights of Indigenous Peoples that without access to quality education, indigenous communities will not be able to fully enjoy their rights: "Deprivation of access to quality education is a major factor contributing to social marginalisation, poverty and dispossession of indigenous peoples". [1]

Indigenous peoples' acute educational marginalisation is closely connected to a number of interlinking factors, such as poverty (child labour), ethnicity (social stigma and institutionalised discrimination), language barriers, gender-based discrimination, traditional practices (including early marriage), and a lack of access to basic services due to their

[1] The Expert Mechanism Advice No. 1 (2009) on the right of indigenous peoples to education is annexed to the Study on lessons learned and challenges to achieve the implementation of the right of indigenous peoples to education (A/HRC/12/33).

geographical isolation. In terms of accessing education, minority girls and women face the greatest challenges. The major shortcoming is that formal school systems rarely reflect the realities of indigenous livelihoods or traditional educational systems: many indigenous peoples have come to see formal school education as a way of assimilating them into mainstream society and eradicating their cultures, languages and ways of life. When indigenous school children are introduced only to the national discourse at the expense of their native discourse, they are in danger of losing part of their identity and heritage.

Factors affecting indigenous girls and women's access to education

- Formal school education is provided in the national language, and the languages of indigenous peoples - as well as the traditional knowledge and skills of indigenous women - are ignored or devalued. Lack of respect and resources cause a critical information gap.
- Most non-indigenous teachers are not prepared to teach in indigenous communities due to lack of cultural training and understanding of indigenous peoples' values and ways of life, creating further difficulties and dangers for girls in travelling to access education.
- The practical and logistical elements of education present barriers to access: school terms and daily schedules do not take into consideration indigenous women's livelihoods, pastoralism or nomadism. Tuition fees and the indirect costs of education (books, uniform) also create barriers.
- Lack of or deficient school infrastructure in the areas where they live; Lack of mobile schools and/or culturally-adequate boarding facilities for nomadic and semi-nomadic indigenous children; home or community.

The following factors also negatively affect indigenous peoples' access to formal education:

- Poor learning conditions including discrimination, physical abuse, and gender violence. Indigenous girls, in particular, experience difficult problems related to unfriendly school environments, gender discrimination, school-based violence and sometimes sexual abuse, all of which contribute to high dropout rates.
- Teaching methods and class discipline techniques clash with what is acceptable for indigenous cultures and girls in particular.
- Militarisation in indigenous territories including the use of community schools as military detachments.

IFUW's position and recommendations

Research shows that investing in girls' education contributes to sustainable and economic development (UNICEF, 2011)[2]. It also, increases the capability of women and girls to realise their rights, determine their life outcomes and influence decision making in households, communities and societies. Investing in non-traditional education for marginalised women and girls has proved to be one of the best means of achieving economic growth (UNESCO, 2015)[3]. IFUW therefore calls upon on governments, global policy makers, education sectors and the civil society to build on existing legislation, develop and share best practices in indigenous education, in order that indigenous men and women are enabled to control their own education systems. Education can be a means to address two of the most fundamental concerns and rights of indigenous peoples: respect for their cultural and linguistic diversity. In addition, in order to overcome discrimination and marginalisation, indigenous peoples need to gain the knowledge necessary to fully and equally participate in the national society, including knowing their rights and mastering the national language. IFUW therefore makes the following recommendations:

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2 UNICEF Annual Report 2011 is available from
http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Annual_Report_2011_EN_060112.pdf

3 UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report Education For All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges, April 2015.

- **States should establish responsive education systems tailored to the specific needs of indigenous people**. For this to be effectively designed and implemented, participatory analysis of educational needs must be undertaken, incorporating disaggregated data for indigenous women and girls from different groups and at all stages of education, primary, secondary, tertiary and continuing education.

- **States must ensure that quality intercultural education is provided at the national and local levels with the aim of eliminating discrimination against women and indigenous peoples.** This transfer of information should also include a recognition of non-traditional knowledge and contribution of indigenous men and women towards sustainable development.

- **Education based on mother tongue curriculum, which incorporates traditional knowledge, will help indigenous girls to stay in schools**. Where possible, teachers should be trained and recruited amongst the indigenous populations themselves, which also provides encouragement for secondary school girls to continue education with a view to becoming educators.

- **-States should recognise the significance and necessity of providing accessible, quality education to indigenous people**. Investment should be made in affordable and accessible internet access and learning technologies (including radio, television and web-ready devices) for all girls and women, and in particular rural, indigenous and economically vulnerable girls and women.

- **-Responsibilities for the conduct of education programmes should be progressively transferred to indigenous peoples themselves**. IFUW recognises that Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own educational institutions and facilities, and obliges states to provide appropriate resources for this purpose.